

Submission to the Parliament of Australia  
Standing Committee on Environment and Heritage  
**Inquiry into Sustainable Cities**  
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# The Case for Food Security in the Sustainable City Blueprint

**Submission on behalf of:**

This submission is endorsed by, and developed in cooperation with, the following organisations and individuals:

- Richard Jones, NSW MP (ret)
- Jo Immig, Total Environment Centre
- Jane Adams, Australian Farmers Markets Association
- Jude and Michel Fanton, Seed Savers Network
- Russ Grayson and Fiona Campbell, Australian Community Garden Network
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- Tom Duncan, Sustainable Community Agriculture Network
- Sam Statham, Natural Produce Network
- See also (attached under mail submission) signatories to petition

**Arrangement**

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**Attachments**

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Feeding the City from the Back 40: A Commercial Food Production Plan for the City of Toronto  
The Way to a City's Heart is Through its Stomach: Putting Food Security on the Urban Planning Menu

**Further information**

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## What we understand of the Blueprint

Australian city dwellers are increasingly aware of the fact that our current settlement patterns and consumption habits are unsustainable in both social and environmental terms. The assumption underlying the Committee's work is that people will need to change, both individually and collectively. A Blueprint for Sustainable Cities 2025 is intended as a guide to city planners and policy makers, as well as urban stakeholders, who will make the many decisions that give life to each city's journey toward sustainability.

While the Blueprint itself is not expected to contain legislation or binding obligations, it is seen as a legitimising document that can inspire proactive reforms and innovations of immense social value. It is a document that will be used to calibrate the many compromises and trade-offs necessary to shift our cities out of developmental deadlock and put them on the track towards a better, more sustainable future.

## We don't see sufficient acknowledgement of food security

We note that in the terms of reference and accompanying discussion paper, there is no explicit mention of food security or the mechanism of food policy. We assert that food security must be a top-level referent of the Sustainable Cities blueprint.

The proposed blueprint suggests a number of factors that must be addressed to ensure and improve the quality of life within the urban environment, reconciling the wide range of competing/co-operative ambitions that city dwellers manifest. The blueprint considers transport planning, access to greenspace, and public health, amongst others. This preoccupation is both valid and constructive.

Yet from a systems perspective, cities are vulnerable to (ie, dependent on) a number of physical externalities, especially in terms of food provision. We note that:

- Cities are characterised by their overwhelming dependence on food supplies from external sources, ie, agricultural production taking place outside metropolitan administrative boundaries.
- Cities are comprised of people who both live within these boundaries and in the suburban fringes, who likewise have a relatively high dependence on food supply from external sources.

Globally, cities occupy 2% of the land area and consume 75% of agricultural output. The obvious conclusion is that cities cannot pretend to be sustainable without due consideration of this external dependency on food systems.

## What happened to the food issue?

Food security is largely marginalised in public policy. This is a peculiar artefact of our economic orientation toward an industrialised form of agriculture that has delivered surpluses of food for several generations through a farming and distribution system that has been encouraged to ignore the full environmental and social costs involved. This artificial accounting is contrary to the concept of sustainability, and leaves a gaping hole in the existing terms of reference for the Blueprint.

Cities, especially in Australia (and despite the high profile of rural development programmes), are the de facto centres of power and influence in shaping social and cultural norms in our society. The policy decisions of city dwellers have everything to do with rural realities. We must recognise that the city is both dependent on and collaborator with rural regions, most notably in terms of food externalities.

A concept of the sustainable city must include consideration of sustainable food, recognising the city's ecological and economic "footprint" that extends beyond the common delimiters of municipal administration. Quoting the Toronto Food Policy Council: " We believe that the future lies in reorienting agricultural policy away from maximum production and towards nourishment, food security and sustainability." The Blueprint must encompass these domains.

## Strategy: Self-sufficiency and symbiotic relations

There are two main production sources for urban food: cultivation in rural areas and urban farming. Of these, rural cultivation is the most familiar, yet it is rarely linked to urban development by planners and policymakers. Even less visible is the existing role and potential opportunities of urban/peri-urban agriculture (UPA).

A sustainability blueprint for cities must address these **external dependencies** to both:

1. Reduce their influence (encourage the city to become more self-sufficient in feeding itself)
2. Optimise their robustness (encourage stronger, more mutually beneficial relationships between the city and its food suppliers)

The combination of these two intentions produces heightened food security. In the context of sustainability, we can see that food security must be built on a holistic process that includes consideration of economic, cultural, and environmental aspirations.

## Self-Sufficiency: City farming

Based on our experience, the key benefits that city farming has delivered in Australia are:

- Participant satisfaction;
- Low cost, clean, fresh food;
- Cost effective management, which is responsive to participant needs;
- An urban sustainable agriculture environment;
- Greater social support within the city farmers;
- Personal empowerment and skills development within participant group; and
- Benefits to the local community in which the sustainable agriculture is situated.

City farms are human institutions. Community capacity built through city farm formation can be extended to broader social objectives. City farming should be seen as playing a role in broader community development.

City farmers have been very successful in addressing social exclusion where they have brought together common language/cultural communities, or communities with a shared experience (eg disability). City farming can play an important role in addressing the need for socially supportive networks amongst groups who might otherwise be marginalised.

City farms work best where they encompass a mix of skills and (generally) incomes. City farms can be most effectively used in a way that combines broader social objectives whilst addressing the needs of city farmers.

Properly positioned and supported, city farming will increasingly become relevant to contemporary concerns about sustainability, community capacity building, social enterprise and development of genuine partnerships between communities, business, and government that will shape Australian cities over the next hundred years.

City farming offers a unique **model of community development** and empowerment. The evidence internationally and within Australia suggests that city farming is capable of generating social capital – that is, networks of trust and reciprocity. Enhanced social capital delivers a range of benefits to city dwellers. These include personal skills development amongst city farmers, better social support systems, improved physical environment and more active participation by city farmers in the communities in which they live. City farmers can deliver a range of benefits to Australian society, including high levels of social participation and satisfaction. Most importantly, city farming delivers social and personal benefits to co-operators through the building of social capital within participant communities. The mobilisation of social

capital combats social exclusion, improves the physical environment, and extends community development benefits to the neighbourhoods in which the city farmers operate. Community based organizations with a strong emphasis on community development and/or permaculture principles (particularly in Australia) have proven an important factor in the development of city farms

City farms can make significant **contributions to the food and resource needs** of cities International research suggests that urban agriculture can make significant contributions to the sustainability of urban environments, both in the quantity and quality of food produced and on other factors which reduce pollutants, transport costs, water usage issues, etc.

It also offers **urban participation in sustainable agriculture**. City farms can act as pivotal points in the development of educational programs for city dwellers to understand the complexities of sustainably managing our environment to meet all our needs. Limiting the role of city farmers to ‘gardening’ limits the opportunities for city farmers to contribute to the broad range of goals in sustainable agriculture, such as creating broader recognition of the issues and generating new sustainable agriculture forms. The marginalisation of city farming in debates about sustainable agriculture in Australia reflects the lack of a strong city farming tradition in urban Australia (aside from the important historical role that market gardeners played in the development of our cities). People generally have little exposure to city farm organizations or experience of their successes.

## **Symbiotic relationships: taking care of the country that feeds us**

In Australia, to our knowledge, there currently are no systemic Local Food Policies that exist to encourage, validate or mandate sustainable local food production and consumption patterns. The content of these policies should be guided by our following guidelines.

**Land use planning** Transporting food products thousands of kilometres whilst ignoring small farmers who can provide much of the local and national component of our food supply, is to continue the unsustainable patterns of food production that have been a relic of colonial attitudes towards land and society.

It is therefore necessary to bring forth Local Food Policy that addresses this burning issue. Without Local Food Policies our society will continue to pave over and build on its most fertile land closest to cities and push farming into more and more marginal lands that cannot support agriculture and the market demands being placed upon it.

Local Food Policies for Sustainable Cities by 2025 need to draw funding to stimulate **research and development of agricultural production and consumption models** that enhance small farm ecological, social and economic viability. Without appropriate funding, the fantastic initiatives that to date have been borne by the public and small farmers without access to appropriate technology and little Governmental Agency networking, will be lost in the rush towards bigger and more industrial agriculture that fails to recognise the true value and sustainability of locally produced and consumed food.

Examples of research and development models that we advocate for inclusion and funding in the Sustainable Cities 2025 Blueprint are; **CSA (Community Supported Agriculture)** as seen successfully in the UK, USA, Japan; **Permaculture** ecological, social and economic design; **Organic and Biodynamic Farming** methods, Bioregional Farmer – **Consumer Cooperatives, Farmers Markets, Supermarket Local Food Content Mandate and Laws, Origin of Production Labelling** as a form of regional produce marketing.

Constraints on the growth of the sustainable Local Food sector through the lack of Local Food Policy can already be seen in the context of Farmers Markets. Often there is great struggle in townships and regional

centres to establish Farmers Markets due to competing influences in Councils, Chambers of Commerce, Local Traders Associations and other market forces. Without effective policy to encourage, validate or mandate sustainable food production and consumption patterns locally, we will find bigger and bigger constraints in developing sustainable cities and towns.

It is therefore our proposal to formulate and build Local Food Content Strategies, Blueprints and potentially Laws. These Strategies, Blueprints and Laws would actively encourage, reward, validate and potentially mandate that a certain amount of local food be consumed in the geographical area of its production. Local Food Content would of course be in line with the productive capacity and Land Capability Assessment guidelines that Land and Water Australia have in place to ensure appropriate land usage patterns.

We also encourage development and implementation of Policies for Whole of Catchment Planning to Agriculture for Sustainable Cities, and ask for Whole Catchment Planning for Food Production and Consumption to be part of Local Council Planning Laws and Environmental Strategies on a national scale. This requires high level consultation, participation, negotiation and development of local drivers within all shire councils of Australia. Good partners in such initiatives would be Australian Community Foods, Environs Australia, and the International Council for Local Environment Initiatives, through their platform of Local Agenda 21, as developed and implemented after the UN Conference for Environment and Development, Rio 1992. We advocate the implementation of Local Agenda 21(LA21) and it's associate policies at local shire levels nationally and for the mandating of Laws concerning Local Agenda 21 for implementation at Federal, State and Shire levels to achieve Sustainable Cities by 2025. Local Agenda 21 is a participative and consultative process model for the local level that brings improvements to all developments including Local Food Content in an environmentally sustainable manner.

Through the LA21 process model we believe that Local Food Content Policies can be developed and implemented in a more holistic manner than top down approach of Policy Development and Implementation. It is only after the coming together of local communities in participative and consultative frameworks, as described in the LA21 framework, that local solutions to food production and consumption can occur, and hence achieve Sustainable Cities by 2025.

By following the guidelines described above for developing and implementing appropriate Local Food Policies at National, State, Local Shire, Bioregion, Catchment, City and Town levels, we will be on our way towards achieving Sustainable Cities by 2025.

## **Restraining forces: problems to be considered**

Lack of awareness in public domain

- Control of the social narrative by large media conglomerates who largely support the interlocked interests of the corporate sector.

Lack of economic imperative in corporate domain

- Corporate commodification of food creates artificial (unsustainable) economic imperatives
- High property values are then able to justify inappropriate development of agrarian spaces

Lack of vision/policy/legislation in government domain

- Lack of data/research funding
- Lack of incubator programmes

## **How food security might be included in the Blueprint**

This submission proposes that there is a need to think big about the role of food policy and city farming. We refer to the need to balance public-government-corporate imperatives, and note that:

- Private (corporate) actors rarely take the role of leaders. They elaborate themselves in a competitive manner within a pre-determined context, or framework. We are suggesting a change to the context.
- In this submission, we represent the "public interest" and are asking for government assistance in adjusting the social framework in which public and private activities are conducted.
- With the tools of policy, legislation, and incubator funding, the framework can be changed so that private activities are shifted toward supporting sustainable food systems.

In the first instance, the Blueprint should insist that city planners formulate a specific document, a Local Food Policy that brings together the wide range of relevant initiatives, regulations, and conditional dependencies so that they can be viewed holistically from the perspective of food security. These would include at least the following:

- Land use planning (protection of agricultural lands; promotion of urban cultivation)
- Transport (producer access to markets; consumer access to retail)
- Health (appropriate regulations for small-scale farmers and food processors; sensible dietary recommendations)
- Economic development (incentives for small-scale, local operators)
- Research (data collection and baseline standardisation)
- Accounting (full cost accounting to include social and environmental impacts)

Given the wide range of variations (constraints and potentials) that exist at a local level, we suggest that the most appropriate mechanism for improving urban food security is through the development of a local food policy within the same conceptual process that the sustainability blueprint is being applied. Such a food policy would take its high-level vision from a national (or international) assessment framework, and would be fleshed out in detail through representative consultation amongst urban (and rural) stakeholders.

The Toronto Food Policy Council is an excellent model for reference. Two of their reports are attached for further reference. Their research and recommendations can be reviewed in full at:

[http://www.city.toronto.on.ca/health/tfpc\\_index.htm](http://www.city.toronto.on.ca/health/tfpc_index.htm)